

Santa Rosa County  
Emergency Services Advisory Committee  
October 18, 2006  
2:00 p.m.  
MINUTES

**Members present:**

James Chalmers  
Stephen Cozart  
Joe Diamond  
Werner Panchenko  
Don Vanderryt

**Staff present:**

Brad Baker  
Deb Grinde

**Invited Guests:**

Diane Wright, Fitch & Associates

Agenda approved as submitted for this meeting with the exception of adding a

Person to Appear as the first item on the agenda.

Minutes for meeting held on August 16, 2006 approved as drafted and submitted.

**Persons to Appear**

Diane Wright, Fitch & Associates, introduced herself and explained their current association with Santa Rosa County. Fitch & Associates performs EMS studies and assessments. There are times when they actually run emergency systems including both paid and volunteer.

In 1999 Fitch & Associates was contracted by Santa Rosa County to review the system as it was and to review the compliance of Rural Metro Ambulance services. In some ways our county was very progressive and in other areas there seemed to be some room for improvement. For instance, utilizing Priority Dispatch's Emergency Medical Dispatch is very progressive. On the other hand, we need a way to measure geographical statistics such as areas of population versus real property.

Fitch & Associates is currently measuring the fire departments' performances in addition to the dispatch center's performance. The intention is to review Rural Metro's compliance next.

Santa Rosa County uses the 90 percentile method of measuring Rural Metro's performance as opposed to averaging. The 90 percentile method is a better method to measure performance.

Santa Rosa County has populated areas and 'dirt' areas, volunteer fire departments and a few paid fire districts and different financial issues with all of these areas. Fitch will be reviewing all of these aspects including all aspects of dispatching. Since their initial report delivered in January 2000 the county has been measuring the fire departments' responses also. They will be developing specifications based on Rural Metro's contract which requires Rural Metro to respond within 12 minutes 90 percent of the time in what is labeled and "urban" area which is covered under an EMS ordinance. In addition, Rural Metro has undertaken the "non-urban" or "rural" area and committed to a response time of less than 20 minutes.

Fitch will review all of these items and will develop a report on all of the issues. A new request for proposal will go out based on all the information based on the best system for the citizens of Santa Rosa County.

S. Cozart questioned whether we will need to stay with an exclusive provider or will options include more than one provider. D. Wright responded that they would not recommend that SRC go in that direction. The county currently has a "no subsidy" contract with Rural Metro and this means the ambulance system runs off the fees from the patients. The county is financially sustainable at this time.

We cover a lot of territory with not a lot of calls and a second provider would not be practical. The "urban" area boundaries may need to be looked at in addition to the population growth prior to releasing the specifications. This information will be included in the specs as the specs actually become part of the contract.

Discussion ensued regarding the entire process.

S. Cozart questioned whether Fitch will recommend anything regarding the fire departments. D. Wright advised that they have talked with most of the chiefs, have reviewed the financial/funding mechanisms, who oversees the systems, response times, what the dynamics of the system are. S. Cozart questioned what has already been learned regarding county wide systems that involve both volunteers and paid firefighters/first responders. Discussion ensued describing several systems and how they evolve. Santa Rosa County has enjoyed the benefits of volunteers for many years. D. Wright answered S. Cozart regarding the two tier system by stating that they are very predominant but would not be making any recommendations this date. It is time to look forward..... She also stated that reports will be written within the next two months pending any CAD data related issues. They have been basically working on the spec writing. Dates and deadlines will be determined.

**Reports and Statistics**

Reports not available at this time due to equipment problems.

**Old Business**

Fire Hydrants

S. Cozart asked where the request regarding the maintenance of the hydrants originated. It was determined that Richard Collins requested that the BOCC address the issue. The BOCC then directed the question to the ESAC committee while under the chairmanship of Chief Reble. It was noted by this committee's chairman that there seemed to be some resistance from the water

purveyors including the presentation of the legal opinion at the last meeting. This came after this committee was led to believe that the water purveyors were, in fact, interested in obtaining direction and assistance from the county. S. Cozart reiterated the fact that the legal opinion presented to this committee by D. Boutwell, Pace Water System, basically stated that the statute is unclear as to whose ownership the hydrants fall under, the land owners or the hydrant owners. From a legal standpoint S. Cozart stated that it would be more sensible to have the owner of the hydrant be responsible for the maintenance of same. That is, then, that the water purveyors would be responsible for the hydrants.

J. Diamond, Avalon VFD, pointed out that no one takes ownership of the hydrants, especially when a hydrant requires maintenance. In addition there are times when the water purveyors turn the water off to a section of homes and the fire department is not notified. If, in the case of an emergency, it was necessary for the fire department to have access to the hydrant (water) and they were not aware that the water had been turned off, it would lead to confusion, embarrassment and disaster in some cases. Communication is critical.

S. Cozart asked B. Baker if there has been any conversation with T. Dannheisser, County Attorney. B. Baker did speak with T. Dannheisser and he indicated that it should be the water purveyors that are responsible for the hydrants.

W. Panchenko stated that since they do the maintenance of the hydrants and some testing then they must realize that it is their responsibility. He also suggested that they add a small fee to the water customers' bills to get reimbursed for the costs.

R. Collins, Pace, FL presented the Florida Administrative Code (FAC) that addresses the issue to each of the committee members and stated that it does not give an option as to the responsibility. It refers to the (water) department.

They have been operating with no oversight for years and based on all of the above including Chapter 5.3 inspection. It states that the code will be followed.

He believes that the water systems do not want to live up to the code and they should be forced to do so within our county. It seems that there is total resistance to a cooperative effort. The county needs to put the hammer down and enforce the FAC.

J. Diamond suggested that we issue a letter to the effect that the water purveyors provide this committee with documentation regarding the maintenance of the hydrants including:

- Location
- Hydrant maintenance completion date
- Results
- Cleanup of physical site

R. Collins questioned how much time is necessary to enforce these activities. It seems that it has been as long as three years now.

J. Diamond stated that we will give them the opportunity to report on their activities and if there are no results a letter will be sent to the BOCC requesting a recommendation from them regarding the lack of activity on the part of the water purveyors.

R. Collins stated that a time line should be provided so that a specific deadline is in effect.

S. Cozart does not want any unnecessary legal challenge within the county. All we can do is make a recommendation to the BOCC. We need to believe that it is the right thing to do initially and realize our reasons for the recommendation to the Board.

S. Cozart reviewed documentation written by Chief Reble regarding the implementation of a listing of recommendations gathered during a previous meeting with water purveyors. It was determined that the letter was never provided to the BOCC. Rather, it was tabled for review by this committee. The document lists issues that needed to be addressed. S. Cozart reviewed each of the items. The first two items indicated that the water purveyors did acknowledge that they were responsible for the maintenance and inspection of the hydrants and the flow testing and color coding of the hydrants. They may no longer perceive these as their responsibilities in light of their presentation during the last ESAC meeting. However, this committee will pursue these guidelines with some modifications as discussed with the majority of the water purveyors.

The following items were discussed briefly:

Placement of Blue Reflective Pavement Markers

The intention was that the fire departments would install the markers and they would be placed in the center of the traffic lane that adjoins the hydrant location.

Inadequate Communication of Hydrant Status This committee reiterated that there should be one point of contact and determined that to be the Santa Rosa County Emergency Communications Center (SRECC).

Water Usage Information

It was determined that this committee should draft a letter to be sent to the Santa Rosa County Firefighters Association in order to address the issue of all fire departments reporting water usage to the water purveyors at least on a monthly basis. S. Cozart will draft a letter and bring to the next meeting. Other subjects that must be reported to the SRCECC include anything of an urgent nature including water outages, dry hydrants, etc.

J. Diamond suggested that the letter be directed to the BOCC and that they in turn issue the letter to each of the water purveyors. S. Cozart agreed and stated that the BOCC may want to mention the codes and regulations regarding the responsibilities of the water purveyors.

Discussion ensued and determined that a letter should be sent to the BOCC, the water purveyors and the fire department chiefs explaining our expectations. A follow up letter should be issued if no action is taken on the part of the water purveyors. B. Baker volunteered to be the contact who will monitor information and data going to and from the parties involved. He will be better able to track the information. He is communicating well with the fire departments at this time and should be able to disseminate the information easily.

We will incorporate the simple things that must be done initially...without documenting any kind of a procedure for all activities.

R. Collins questioned when the letters will be sent to the Commissioners and the water purveyors. S. Cozart advised that the

letters will be reviewed at the November 15, 2006 meeting.

S. Cozart noted that the last item listed on the letter authored by Chief Reble refers to the installation of the new hydrants and that this committee will table this issue for some time in the future. It is the feeling of this committee that this issue should be built into the county building ordinance.

B. Baker stated that he has noticed colored hydrants here and there. J. Diamond noted that the Pace VFD has started coding and stated that it is possible that they have started some flow testing.

S. Cozart reviewed the final recommendations suggested in the letter drafted by Chief Reble:

It has been determined that a maintenance crew would not be recommended by this committee. The idea has been abolished.

Committee noted that the reflectors are available for use by the fire departments.

Committee determined that an ordinance regarding these reflectors may not be necessary at this time.

This committee will establish a standard procedure for flow testing, color coding and numbering for all hydrants.

Discussion followed regarding the numbering system and B. Baker to verify.

### **New Business**

#### **MSBU Funding**

B. Baker explained what activities are taking place regarding the fire departments seeking an increase in MSBU funding. B. Baker has reviewed the departments' audits, budgets, etc. He has requested direction from S. Bracewell, T. Gomillion and H. Walker regarding the needs of the fire districts. With their support he has started meeting with the MSBU Fire Chiefs and initiated both short and long term planning on the parts of the fire departments. He is attempting to bring all of the MSBU departments up to the NFPA standards, creating a minimum standard for them and establishing standards for the future (up to five years away). He performed a comprehensive evaluation of each of those departments and presented them to Fitch and Associates for their recommendations.

J. Diamond requested that B. Baker bring a listing of the equipment to the next meeting so that the members can review the age, condition etc of the equipment.

B. Baker explained that some of the gear, air packs, safety straps, etc is becoming obsolete and it is necessary for the items to be replaced.

J. Diamond questioned whether a comparison has been considered between MSBU funding and MSTU funding. B. Baker is working with the Property Appraiser at this time attempting to determine which method would be best for the county. J. Diamond wondered whether an impact fee for fire services could be attached to new residences. B. Baker stated the idea for an additional impact fee is not an option at this time.

S. Cozart talked of some of the weaknesses of the MSBU funding such as in the Munson area. The MSBU funding seems insufficient for that area.

B. Baker explained that discussions are being held on what options are available, such as county wide funding.

Discussion ensued regarding the funding for county wide fire services. B. Baker explained that the county would not provide additional funding without some sort of overseeing by the county. The fire departments do have an understanding of this and there seems to be cohesiveness among the departments.

S. Cozart stated that it may be difficult for the increases to occur.

R. Collins, Pace, FL believes that after B. Baker has completed his work with the fire departments the citizens will not resist the ideas presented. He also stated that a general public referendum is not necessary; the BOCC is able to pass an increase without a referendum. He noted that a major selling point to the county will be that improvement to the ISO ratings will positively affect the insurance rates.

J. Diamond questioned whether there are any plans for paid firefighters. B. Baker stated that they are considering paid fighters as soon as within the next two years especially in the Pace and Skyline areas. J. Diamond stated that the daytime hours seem to be the most critical and he is glad to hear that we are planning for the future. B. Baker indicated that a paid crew in the area would also be able to assist with other districts if necessary.

J. Diamond thanked B. Baker for doing a good job. S. Cozart noted that it seems to have made a great difference in the level of cooperation from the different departments. B. Baker said that the firefighters are working at a cooperative effort also!

### **Public Comments**

None

No further discussion and meeting adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

Next meeting will be held on November 15, 2006 at 2:00 p.m.